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ABSTRACT

Certain simplification and reduction processes used by Arabs in learning English as a second language are examined, such as: (1) simplification of syllables, (2) deletion of English articles, and (3) generation of English questions by using only intonation and leaving word order intact. The study is made from the perspective of two theories of second language learning: the restructuring continuum, where the learner gradually replaces the first language features with second language features, and the developmental continuum, where the learner proceeds in the manner of a child learning the native language. The specific processes examined are: deletion of the final consonant, especially in a consonant cluster, or insertion of a vowel to break the consonant cluster; deletion of the final vowel-consonant combination, such as -ed; reduction of syllables by internal vowel deletion; reduction of an initial consonant cluster or middle abutting consonants; and deletion of a weak syllable or consonant-vowel form from a syllable. The relationship of these processes to Arabic or English structures or to interaction between them is also analyzed. The data are drawn from a 1979 error analysis study. A three-page bibliography concludes this paper. (MSE)

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SIMPLIFICATION AND REDUCTION AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES: IMPLICATIONS FROM JORDANIAN ARABS LEARNING ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION

Very little, to the best of my knowledge, has been published on the strategies Arab learners of English use in learning English as a foreign or a second language. This is especially so at the phonological and morphological levels.

The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on certain simplification and reduction processes Jordanian Arabs use in learning English, namely: (1) simplifying the syllables of English; (2) deleting English articles; and (3) generating English questions by means of intonation only, rather leaving the word order in the sentence unchanged, as it is in the statement form. It is also of interest to show how far these processes of simplification and reduction are related to L1 or L2 structures or to both interacting with each other.

The data used in this article rely on an Error Analysis study conducted in 1979 on the performance of Jordanian students learning English (El-Haleem a). 203 students from the three upper secondary classes 1st, 2nd and 3rd, were asked to read a short story taken from a book of fables and then reproduce it in their own words in an informal situation outside of the classroom. The performance of these subjects, in both cases, was recorded on tape. The performance of 100 subjects was transcribed on paper and that of the rest was listened to carefully. Deviant forms were noted down and categorized.

The errors which form the data of this article are taken from the performance of the subjects during free reproduction of the short story.

L2-Learners Errors and Language Acquisition

Error Analysis was introduced in the sixties as an alternative to Contrastive Analysis when the latter failed in solving the

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problems of foreign and second language (L2) teaching and learning and in explaining the nature of language learning. At the same time the study of L2 learner errors was no longer restricted to the problem of teaching L2 and preparing materials for this purpose but it gained a great significance in studying L2 learning processes and to a certain extent L1 acquisition. Corder (1981: 8) states that "some at least of the strategies adopted by the learner of a second language are substantially the same as those by which a first language is acquired". He then emphasises the significance of the L2-learner's errors; they reflect his competence in the language he is using at a certain learning stage and they are themselves systematic. They represent rule learning and language acquisition (Richards 1971). They tell us something about strategies the L2-learner uses in the process of his learning the language. They play a significant role in L2 learning. They are no longer looked upon as deviant forms but as representative of a certain developmental stage of L2-learning. This developmental stage at a certain time has been called "Interlanguage" by Selinker (1972) and "APproximative System" By Nemser (1974), and "Transitional Competence" by Corder (1967).

L2-learning can, then, be described as a dynamic process moving along some continuum in the direction of the target language. Two continua are recognized with a process of learning moving along each: (1) "Restructuring Continuum" where the learner replaces the features of his L1 with features of L2 in a gradual manner; errors resulting from this "Progressive Structuring" are related to L1 and they are called transfer errors; (2) "Developmental Continuum", where the learner proceeds in learning L2 in the same way as a child acquires L1, in a process of "increasing complexification"; errors resulting from this process are called developmental errors and they are in most cases related to L2 structure (Corder 1979: 74).

The two processes needn't be mutually exclusive but often are interrelated. Where L1 structures have counterparts in L2, transfer errors take place, as the learner relies on prior knowledge of L1 in his acquisition of L2. L1 has no influence on the

sequence of learning L2 but it may accelerate it. As will be seen below, some errors are ambiguous as they can be related to a restructuring or to a developmental process. The restructuring process is characteristic of the early stages of learning L2 and in general it holds for learning the phonology of L2.

Assumptions about the significance of the L2-learner's errors motivated scholars to conduct research on L1 as well as L2 acquisition, by means of investigating these errors to shed light on the nature of cognitive processes and strategies learners adopt in acquiring L2. The issue which has been raised for over a decade is whether L2 acquisition relies on cognitive mechanisms and language processing strategies used in acquiring L1, or whether they draw on constructing rules which depend on L2.

Dulay and Burt in a study on L2 acquisition indicate that children use the same strategies in L2 acquisition irrespective of their L1 background. They found that "the types of errors in English that Spanish-, Chinese-, Japanese- and Norwegian-speaking children make while learning English are strikingly similar" (Dulay and Burt 1974). In another study they found that three groups of Spanish-speaking children acquired eight English grammatical structures in almost the same sequence (Dulay and Burt 1973). In a third study (Dulay and Burt 1974) they found that Chinese- and Spanish-speaking children acquired 11 English grammatical morphemes in a similar "natural order". Their findings are similar to the results of Brown's (1973) longitudinal study which shows that children in acquiring English as L1 tend to acquire grammatical morphemes and function words in a certain order. They came to the conclusion that children use common universal cognitive mechanisms in organising L2. The acquisition process is guided by L2 rather than L1. These universal innate common mechanisms control the formulation of certain "types of hypotheses about the language system being acquired".

Henning Wode (1976) from the Kiel Project on Language Acquisition, giving evidence from research on the acquisition of phonetics-phonology for L2 English/L1 German, plural inflection

of L2 German/L1 English and negation L2 English/L1 German as well as L2 German/L1 English, agrees with other investigators (Corder 1967, Dulay and Burt 1974, and Hatch and Wagner-Crough 1975) that "naturalistic L2 acquisition follows ordered developmental sequences"; but she disagrees with them on the view they hold that L2 is acquired like L1 (identity hypothesis). She emphasizes that children rely on prior knowledge of L1 in their acquisition of L2 and this process is systematic. The developmental sequences "reflect both the structure of the L2 target language as well as the L1 acquired previously. L2 children draw on the structure of the two languages in highly systematic ways" (Henning Wode 1976). Tucker and Scott (1974) in their error-analysis study of the English performance of 22 Arabic speaking students, indicate that structures of L1 influence those of L2 and when this happens, L2 structures tend to be fossilized.

At the initial stage of learning, the learner uses his limited knowledge of L2 to communicate with other persons including L2 natives. When the situation is above his limited linguistic competence he resorts to various types of communication strategies such as using his previous knowledge of L2, utilizing L1 system as a heuristic technique-strategy of learning, avoiding difficult forms, or using simplified or reduced utterances. His utterances are characterised as being variable according to certain patterns due to social, linguistic or other factors (Dickerson 1975, 1974, Tarone 1983). For example, the learner uses more target-like variants in a formal situation but in a free oral production he uses simplification as he avoids structures he is not sure of. The performance of the L2-learner in a classroom controlled situation is different from his performance when he uses L2 to communicate with L2 natives or other people in a free situation. According to Smith (1971) there are three components of the function of language: Communicative, Integrative and Expressive. The communicative function is restricted to exchanging information with other persons, since the learner's knowledge of L2 is still limited. The integrative function is characterized by an expansion of the learner's knowledge of L2 and he utilizes this linguistic

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knowledge to make himself an identity in the L2 society. When the learner's knowledge of L2 is wide enough, he is in a position to express his psychological needs in the L2 society in the same way as the native speakers do. Lambert (1970) indicates that integrative motivation results in successful L2 learning. Pidginised forms indicate that the function of L2 is limited to communication.

The early stage of learning L2 is characterized by systematic features of simplification, generalisation and reduction of grammatical redundancy (Dulay and Burt 1972). Generally speaking, simplification indicates the deletion of certain morphological endings (e.g. verb, plural and possessive inflection), phonological items (e.g. weak syllables, consonants or vowels) and structural words (e.g. copula verbs, articles), and reduction indicates the elimination of redundant vocabulary items or redundant grammatical transformations (e.g. using intonation to generate questions in English and maintaining the word order unchanged) (Selinker 1972, Corder 1975, Goodman 1967, Hymes 1971).

Syllable Structure in Jordanian Arabic and English[2]

The number of consonants clustering at the beginning and the end of a syllable in English and in Arabic can be symbolized as follows:

English: C_0^3 V C_0^4

Arabic: C_1^2 V C_0^2

This means the onset (consonant cluster with which the syllable begins) in the English syllable consists of zero to three consonants, and the coda (the final consonant cluster in the syllable) includes zero to four consonants, e.g.,

Onset		Coda	
at	æt	saw	sɔ:
sat	sæt	sat	sæt
spin	spin	build	biid
spring	sprin	builds	biidz
		texts	teksts

The onset in Arabic includes one to two consonants and the coda, zero to two consonants, e.g.,[3,4]

Onset		Coda	
ka:l	"he measured"	'masha	"he walked"
kta:l	"fighting"	'mashat	"she walked"
		^{c}abd	"slave"

English interludes (the consonants which occur in sequence between two vowels in a word, abutting consonants) include from zero to four consonants, and in Arabic from one to three consonants.

English: V C_0^4 V, e.g.,

coeducation
begin
contain
contribute
explain

Arabic: V C_1^3 V

'katab	"he wrote"
'biktib	"he writes"
'sim^{c}tu	"she heard him"

Certain onsets, codas and interludes in Arabic are only admissible in quick speech, and in normal speech they are inadmissible. These inadmissible sequences of consonants are broken by means of a short vowel known as anaptyctic, which is never stressed (phonologically symbolized as A, and in transcription, it is doubly underlined). This short vowel is a close, front /i/ or back /u/ in Jordanian Arabic (and an open /a/ in Egyptian Arabic, Mitchell, 1960).

The inadmissible sequences in Jordanian Arabic, and the ways they are interrupted by an anaptyctic vowel are as follows:

1. An onset of two consonants beginning a word in a post-pausal position (at the beginning of an utterance) and here the anaptyctic precedes the first consonant in the onset, and it

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is preceded in turn by a glottal stop, as words in Arabic never begin with a vowel:

Quick Speech		Normal Speech	
# # C C V ___		# # ? A C C V ___	
ktib	"write!"	'?iktib	"write!"
g^{C}ud	"sit down!"	'?ug^{C}ud	"sit down!"

2. An interlude of three consonants, and here the anaptyctic vowel intervenes between the first two consonants.

Quick Speech		Normal Speech	
___ V C C C V ___		___ V C-A C C V ___	
'sim^{C}tu	"she heard him"	'simi^{C}tu	
	cf.	si'mi^{C}tu	"I heard him"

3. A coda of two different consonants, and here the anaptyctic vowel intervenes between them. Where they are a geminate, no anaptyctic vowel intervenes, e.g., ^{C}add - "he counted".

Quick Speech		Normal Speech	
V C C # #		V C A C # #	
^{C}abd	"slave"	^{C}abid	

The following rule can be set up for the insertion of the anaptyctic vowel in Arabic:

$$\emptyset \longrightarrow \begin{bmatrix} V \\ +\text{high} \\ -\text{tense} \\ -\text{stress} \\ \alpha\text{back} \\ \alpha\text{round} \end{bmatrix} \Big/ \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \#\ \#\ __\ C\ C\ V \\ \begin{bmatrix} V \\ \alpha\text{back} \\ \alpha\text{round} \end{bmatrix} \quad C\ __\ C\ C\ V \\ V\ C\ __\ C\ \#\ \# \end{bmatrix} \right\}$$

Types of Simplification:

1. Deleting the final consonants especially in a final consonant cluster, e.g. niks or neks (nekst),[5] skra:tsh or ?iskra:tsh

(skræ:tsht), ðemself (ðəmself), ?ilifan (elifnt), ?apiti (æpətait), diso:lv (dizəulvd), wils (wailst).[6]

Many subjects inserted an anaptyctic vowel to prevent the final consonant cluster as an alternative process to final consonant deletion, e.g. nekest/nikist (nekst), skra:tshid (skræ:tsht), diso:lvid (dizəulvd), vikist (vekst), welist (wailst), ha:vint (hævnt).

It can be seen in these examples that the anaptyctic vowel is inserted between the first and second consonants in the final 3-consonant cluster where the final two consonants are st, nt or nd, otherwise it is inserted between the second and third consonant. Subjects also prevented an initial consonant cluster by inserting an anaptyctic vowel before the first consonant in a 2-consonant cluster (and here the anaptyctic vowel is preceded by a glottal stop) and after the first consonant in a 3-consonant cluster, e.g.
?islept (slept), ?iprizentli (prezentli), ?isikra:shiŋ (skræ:tshiŋ), sikra:tsh (skræ:tsh), sikra:tshid (skræ:tsht).
In the last example an anaptyctic vowel is inserted after the initial consonant and another before the final consonant to prevent an initial 3-consonant cluster and final 2-consonant cluster.

2. Deleting the vc ending of the word; these are in most cases morphological endings, e.g.
?aksept (əkseptid), ?atend (ə'tendid), disa:jd (disaidid), ?e:pit (æpətait), ?i:t (?i:tiŋ).

3. Deleting a vowel from inside the word, reducing the number of the syllables of the word by one, e.g.
pro:spal/prosel/propsa:l (prəpəuzl), swa:ld (swɔləud , fo:rst (fərist), watvar (wɔtevə), se:rps (səpa:s), ?arval (əraivəl), tshiks (tshikin).

4. Deleting a consonant from inside the word, reducing an initial consonant cluster or medial abutting consonants, e.g.
dweliŋz (dwelingz), fiding (faindiŋ), ripo:shd (ripрəutsht), satifaiz (sætisfaiz).

5. Deleting a weak syllable or a cv form from a syllable in the word, e.g. ro:s (ə'rəuz), slo:d (swoləud), prantli/prentli (prezəntli).

6. Deleting the definite and indefinite articles, e.g.[7]

?ilifint ?and tshikin	(the elephant and the chicken)
?abaut tshkin	(about the chicken)
?and ?ilifant	(and the elephant)
bʌt ?ilivan	(but the elephant)
?andar tri:	(under a tree)
tu tshikin	(to the chicken)
ha:d dispju:t	(had a dispute)
de:r we:r tshikin	(there was a chicken)
da:n ?ilifant	(than the elephant)
?an ?elifant and tshikin	(an elephant and a chicken)

DISCUSSION

Errors resulting from the deletion of the final consonant in (1) above are ambiguous; they can be related to developmental or transfer processes. In the first place one can say that it is difficult for Arabic speakers to produce a final 3-consonant cluster, which is a feature of English rather than Arabic. Arabs learning English then use the strategy of simplifying the final 3-consonant cluster by deleting the final consonant or inserting an anaptyctic vowel to break the cluster. On the other hand, these errors can be related to Arabic interference into English as Arabic has no final 3-consonant cluster. It has a final 2-consonant cluster, but there is always a tendency to insert an anaptyctic vowel between the final two consonants, e.g.

/^{C}abd/ and /^{C}abid? "slave"

are used in free variation. The deletion of the vc endings in (2) can be related to a developmental process as the L2 learners use this strategy of deletion to make words shorter and hence easier to produce. Arabic as L1 has nothing to do with errors resulting from this deletion.

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The errors resulting from the deletion of a vowel from inside the word in (3) can be described as developmental. It is a strategy the learners use in reducing the number of syllables in the word by one, i.e., simplifying the word structure in terms of the number of the syllables. Nevertheless the syllable structure in terms of the consonants clustering at the end of the resulting monosyllablic words or in the middle of the disyllabic words, is made more complex. Some resulting monosyllabic words end with a 3-consonant cluster, a feature which never occurs in Arabic, e.g.

fo:rst (fɔrist) and se:rps (sɘpa:s)

An important question arises here: which form is simpler for a language learner to produce, a word with more syllables and less consonant clusters or a word with less syllables but with more consonants clustering in the syllable?

Some of the forms, here, resulting from deleting a vowel, are made to conform with the phonological structure of Arabic words, e.g. prantli/prentli (prɛzɘntli) is similar to Arabic /ᶜmiltli/ "you did something for me" and /watvar/ (wɔteva) to Arabic /galbak/ "your heart" and /ᶜanter/ "a proper name".

It is possible, then, to relate such errors to transfer factors. The errors resulting in (4) and (5) above can be described as developmental as no features of Arabic are imposed here on those of English.

The omissions in 3, 4 and 5 above can be attributed to unfamiliarity of the students with these words. Some words were introduced to subjects from the secondary classes for the first time, e.g. "reproached", and other words although not new to the subjects, were not properly acquired.

The deletion of the definite article in (6) above is not likely attributed to language transfer as the corresponding Arabic forms have the definite article /ʔal-/ "the", e.g. /ʔand ʔilifant/ "and the elephant", has the Arabic counterpart /wal fi:l/. The items where the indefinite article has been omitted, however, have counterparts in Arabic with no indefinite article since Arabic

lacks this article, e.g.:

?an ?elifant and tshikin "an elephant and a chicken";

the Arabic literal translation is:

elephant and chicken (fi:l wa katku:t)

Errors resulting from deleting the indefinite article can be ambiguous as they can be related to negative transfer from Arabic which lacks this article or to a developmental strategy of simplification. But as the definite and indefinite articles are subject to deletion and negative transfer is not likely to be the cause for deleting the definite article, one tends to suggest that the same strategy applies to the deletion of the indefinite article.

Brown (1973) reports that his three subjects (the children: Adam, Eve and Sarah) in acquiring English as L1, acquired the articles (the and a) at the midway stage of acquiring the grammatical morphemes and function words. Krashen (1977) reports that the order of acquisition for L1 is not the same as the acquisition of L2, though is similar to it in some respects. However, he, like Brown, also places the article in the middle of the acquisition order. Their findings strengthen the suggestion that the article deletion can be more related to developmental rather than transfer strategies. Oller (1974) in comparing the acquisition of L1 and L2 strategies states that:

1. In acquiring L2 phonology learners (children below three):
   a. reduce the consonant cluster in the word,
   b. delete the final consonant in the word,
   c. delete a weak syllable.

On the other hand, in the acquisition of L2 phonology learners

2. use an epenthetic vowel instead of deleting a final consonant or reducing a consonant cluster. Deleting a weak syllable is not a frequent strategy.

The material in this paper shows that both strategies, reducing a consonant cluster or deleting a final consonant on the one hand or inserting an epenthetic vowel, is a strategy used by Jordanians learning English. This process of simplifying the syllable structure in English is in many cases independant of

the common process of transferring their Arabic native syllable structure into English.

My findings are similar to what Tarone (1976) reports about the results of her analysis of spontaneous utterances of two native speakers of each of Cantonese, Portuguese and Korean learning English as L2; she found that in addition to the common process of transferring the syllable structure into English as L2, these learners use both epenthesis and consonant deletion to simplify consonant clusters to simpler cv patterns. Tarone accounts for this in terms of the hypothesis that the cv syllable may be a universal articulator and basic perceptual unit which tends to operate in basic cv systems in all languages. Different languages elaborate on this program in different ways adding permissible initial and final consonants.

REDUCTION

Reduction is exemplified in avoiding redundancy such as reducing vocabulary items or grammatical transformations (Schumann 1975). We are concerned here with one way of avoiding redundancy, namely, avoiding changing word order in generating questions and using intonation only.

Questions in English are generated by word order and intonation. In yes/no-questions a rising intonation, e.g.

1. It is raining. ↘
   Is it raining? ↗
2. His name is John. ↘
   What is his name? ↘

In Arabic, be it spoken or standard, the word order in verbal sentences[8] plays no part in generating questions; it is intonation which does the job. Rising intonation is used in yes/no-questions and falling intonation in wh- questions. The yes/no-questions in standard Arabic but not in spoken Arabic begin with a question particle. Wh- questions in both forms of Arabic, however, begin with a question word, e.g.

1. yes/no questions

a. Spoken Arabic

'katab il'walad risa:li ↘	"the boy wrote a letter"
'katab il'walad risa:li ↗?	"did the boy write a letter?"

b. Standard Arabic

'kataba l'waladu risa:latan ↘.	"the boy wrote a letter"
hal 'kataba l'waladu risa:latan ↗?	"did the boy write a letter?"

2. wh- questions

a. Spoken Arabic

'katabi l'walad risa:li ↘	"the boy wrote a letter"
wikte:sh 'katabi l'walad risa:li ↘	"when did the boy write a letter?"

b. Standard Arabic

'kataba l'waladu risa:latan ↘	"the boy wrote a letter"
'mata: kataba l'waladu risa:latan ↘	"when did the boy write a letter?"

Here are some examples, from my material, of English questions generated by the use of intonation only and unchanged word order, as it is in the statement form.

1. yes/no questions

The chicken arrived? ↗	(Did the chicken arrive) ↗
The book is new? ↗	(Is the book new) ↗

2. wh- questions

When you bring the book? ↘	(When did you bring the book) ↘
Where your father went? ↘	(Where did your father go) ↘

This wrong question generation is more common where the insertion of do is needed.

DISCUSSION

The issue arising here is whether generating English questions this way, disregarding word order and utilizing intonation only, is related to negative transfer from Arabic, where questions are generated by means of intonation only and word order plays no part, or it is related to the strategy of avoiding redundancy usually adopted by learners of L2 at the initial stage of their learning.

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or to both processes interacting with each other. Although it is very difficult to decide, one would tend to suggest that both factors interact since the avoidance of redundancy strategy has been reported for learners of English with various L1 background and negative transfer is very likely at this stage (Ravem 1979, Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann 1979).

CONCLUSION

The following types of modification of the syllable structure and word structure have been found for adult Jordanian Arab students learning English as a foreign language.

1. Deleting the final consonant, particularly in a final consonant cluster, or inserting an anaptyctic vowel to break the C-cluster.
2. Deleting final VC (in most cases a morphological ending) in the word.
3. Reducing the number of syllables of the word by deleting a vowel from inside the word.
4. Reducing an initial C-cluster or middle abutting consonants.
5. Deleting a weak syllable or a cv form from a syllable in the word.
6. Deleting the definite and indefinite articles.

In certain cases the number of syllables in the word is reduced but the syllable structure is made more complex by increasing the number of consonants clustering in the syllable.

It has been also found that Arab students generate English questions by means of intonation only and word order remains unchanged.

Errors caused by deleting a final consonant and the indefinite article and generating questions are ambiguous, as they can be related either to negative transfer from Arabic or to a developmental strategy. Anyhow, such errors can be related to both cases interacting with each other.

My findings concerning these simplification and reduction processes which Jordanian students use in acquiring English as L2 are in congruence with the findings of other researchers on L2 acquisition. This indicates that at the initial stage of acquiring L2, L2 learners use similar types of simplification and reduction processes; variation in their output can be related to socio-linguistic or other factors (Tarone 1983). This adds to the speculation that there may be universal processes of simplification and reduction operating in L2 acquisition.

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Footnotes

1. The Acquisition-Learning Distinction hypothesized by Krashen is dealt with in this article. We are concerned with learning rather than acquiring English by Jordanian students, as the only way that these students are exposed to English is through formal teaching in the classroom. They tend to have no "implicit learning, informal learning or natural learning." They "know about" rather than "pick up" English (Krashen 1982 - 12).

2. Jordanian Arabic used in this study is based on the variety used by the country people (the author's dialect), and English is based on the form of RP English taught to foreigners (Daniel Jones 1956, Grimson 1980, Trudgill and Hughes 1980).

3. In some dialects the onset includes from one to three, e.g., strih - "have a rest"

4. An anaptyctic vowel is a characteristic of colloquial rather than standard Arabic.

5. The right forms are enclosed between two brackets.

6. Any error stated in this study was made by at least 15 subjects.

7. A thorough investigation, by the present author, of the deletion of the English articles by Arabs learning English is under preparation.

8. In the neutral word order in a nominal sentence yes/no-question in spoken Arabic the predicate is moved before the subject, e.g. lwalad ðaki ↘ (statement), ðakilwalad ↗ "is the boy clever?" In standard Arabic nominal sentence yes/no-questions, the word order depends on the question particle which precedes the sentence, e.g. ʔəlwaladu ðəkijjən ↘ (statement) "the boy is clever," hal ilwaladu ðakijjən ↗ "is the boy clever?" ʔa ðəkijjən ilwaladu ↗ "is the boy clever?" The issue is very much complicated insofar as the wh-nominal sentence questions are concerned and it is beyond our goal in this article.

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